SEMI-CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE.

BY REV. THOMAS LAURIE, D. D.

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SEMI-CENTENNIAL DISCOURSE.

A DISCOURSE

DELIVERED AT

West Roxbury (Boston), Mass.,

ON THE

FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

South Evangelical Church,

JUNE 7, 1885,

By REV. THOMAS LAURIE, D. D.

BOSTON:

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1885.

PASTORS.

	Installed.	Dismissed
REV. CHRISTOPHER MARSH	May 17, 1837	Dec. 11, 1850
REV. THOMAS LAURIE, D. D	May 7, 1851	Jan. 30, 1868
REV. WILLIAM S. HUBBELL, D. D	Jan. 30, 1868	Jan. 25, 1872
REV. EDWARD STRONG, D. D	May 2, 1872	July 13, 1882
REV. CLARENCE A. BECKWITH	Nov. 2, 1882	

DISCOURSE.

AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH. - Col. i: 18.

What is a church? A Congregationalist might reply, "A company of believers in covenant with God, and with each other, to serve God, and observe his ordinances," and in one sense he answers well.

We have a better answer, however, in the words before us. "The church is the body of Christ"—a short definition, but full of the heaven whence it came, for it tells us that as Christ had a body when he walked a man among men, so has he today. As then, he looked through the eyes of that body, heard through its ears, spoke through its organs of speech, and wrought through its hands, so now he acts through his church, not only transforming its members into his own image, but through them making others also partakers of the same grace. We cannot hold too firmly that it is not the church which blesses man, but Christ working through the church, as once he acted through his body that hungered and was weary, suffered, and was nailed to the cross. What mighty work could that body have wrought without his indwelling spirit? Precisely so does Christ work in his church today. Take Christ out of our churches, and what would remain? Nothing but branches cut off from the vine, and so fit only for the fire. Even if only once he should be absent from its assemblies, that meeting, whether on the Sabbath or through the week, would show no sign of spiritual life, nor could it until he came and made it live.

This Bible view of the church glorifies it. View it as a mere human organization of good men, and we tremble as we think of their possibilities of evil—of their liability even to

apostacy. But when we view it as his body, we know that he will never leave it nor forsake it, for he dieth no more, but is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Look on it as a mere human body of men, and how soon will they scatter, this one to another church, and that one to the grave. Like the river flowing by, never composed of the same drops for two moments, so some churches undergo a perpetual change, but the fact that it is the body of Christ preserves its identity from age to age.

When your second pastor came here in 1851 he found two deacons. The senior deacon an Israelite indeed, in whom was no guile. The other totally different, and yet simple hearted as a child. During that pastorate two other deacons were chosen. One whose peculiar fitness had previously caused him to be selected for that office, and another whose rare qualifications made him your unanimous choice. When the pastor left in 1867 he left them all in active service, but hardly had he gone before the senior deacon was called home. In less than two years, Deacon Alvin Smith followed, and in a little more than four years, not one of the four remained. As often as the absent pastor thought of you, those four vacant places first rose up before him, and were the last thing to leave his thoughts.

Twice over has this church been sorely tried in the loss of its officers. August 4, 1871, Deacon Lucius A. Tolman died, and on September 25, Deacon Michael Whittemore followed him to heaven. Deacon John Walker died February 20, 1885, and only three days later, Deacon George Smith entered into rest — a blessed rest to a faithful servant.

The mention of deacons suggests another who had filled that office in Roxbury, but whose modesty refused it here, yet Deacon Andrew S. March—for the title followed him—was not therefore idle or unfruitful, and we missed him sadly when December 25, 1854, we laid in the grave the body still united to Christ, to rest there until the resurrection.

Amid such losses what has kept this church alive? Only He who having raised up these, and wrought through them, still fills the vacant places and carries on his work. Even while our bodies continue to be the home of our spirits, their material so changes, that in a few years, not a particle remains the same. So is it also with this body of the Lord Jesus. Only while in our bodies effete matter disappears, we scarce know how or

when, the living stones in this building—to use another Bible figure—go to be with Christ and to behold his glory.

And so both here and there, branches in the true vine bear fruit to God. Only those which have "climbed over the wall" that separates earth from heaven, bear better fruit; how much better we shall know when we come to be among them.

If the church is the body of him who liveth through all the ages, let us look back at the beginning of this life in Roxbury. From the first Christ had made the trees and plants, that every year leaved out afresh on these hills and valleys. He adorned them with their rich variety of beauty. So the animals that fed on the plants, or lay down under the trees, the birds that made the groves vocal with their songs, all lived from him, and were fed daily from his hand, but they were not created in his image, and man had lost it, till it was restored again in Christ, when he became united to the body of his Redeemer.

The first church in Roxbury was formed in 1632, with seventeen members, only twelve years after the landing at Plymouth, with John Eliot for its first teacher, and Thomas Weld for pastor. The official life of Eliot and Nehemiah Walter, his successor, extended continuously over one hundred and twenty years. Surely the churches in Roxbury ought to be interested in missions today, when the first minister two hundred and fifty years ago, labored so earnestly for the salvation of the red man who roamed over these hills, and passed up and down yon river in his canoe. The Indian Bible, that precious memorial of Eliot, suggests memories of multitudes who, before their race disappeared from earth, had learned from it the way to heaven.

The second church was formed eighty years later, November, 1712, in what is now Roslindale. Their house of worship

I The first Bible printed in America was this Massachusetts or Mohican Bible, Cambridge, Mass., 1663, the New Testament having appeared two years previously. The title is, "Mamussee Wuneetupanatamwe up Biblum God. Naneeswe Nukkone Testament kah wonk Wusku Testament. Ne quoshkinnumuk nashpe Wuttineumoh Christ noh oscowesit John Eliot." i. e. The whole holy his Bible God, both Old Testament and also New Testament. This turned by the servant of Christ, who is called John Eliot. The volume is now extremely rare, and commands a great price, as high as \$1,300.00 have been paid for a copy. J. Eliot was born at Nasing in Essex, Eng., 1604, and died in Roxbury, Mass., May 20, 1690.

was on Walter Street, so named in honor of the second minister of the first church. Only a deserted graveyard now marks the site, though thirty-three years ago the preacher attended the funeral of Elizabeth Richards, aet. ninety-six, who attended church there in early life.

The third church was formed in Jamaica Plain, December, 1770, and three years later the second church erected the meeting house near Central Station, though the spire was not added till 1822.

All these churches were more orthodox than many churches bearing that name today, but great spiritual declension preceded the Revolution, and so increased after it, that in the early part of this century it is to be feared that salvation through the atoning death of the Son of God was nowhere preached in Roxbury. The Baptist church in Dudley Street first lifted up the fallen standard in 1821. The Eliot (Congregational) Church, in Kenilworth Street, followed September 18, 1834, and this church joined their ranks June 11, 1835, witnessing that Christ crucified is to them that are called the power of God and the wisdom of God for salvation.

It is difficult for us today to appreciate the condition of things here at that time. Some might be more impressed with their secular aspect. No railroad went out of Boston till after the close of the first third of the present century (1833). Society here was somewhat primitive compared with what one would expect so near to the capital. The wave of progress did not gather momentum till it had passed West Roxbury, and reached to regions beyond.

The religious aspect, however, is what most concerns us. Liberality was preferred to godliness. The church of Dedham had been driven out of its house of worship, and its communion furniture taken from it by due process of law. Here church

¹A charter to build a railroad to Lowell was granted in 1830. In 1831 the Boston & Providence, also the Boston & Worcester Railroad corporations were organized, and the construction of the three roads was begun in 1832. The Boston & Worcester Railroad was opened for travel part way, April, 1834, and to Worcester July 4, 1835. The Boston & Providence Railroad was opened to Readville, June 4, 1834, and to Providence August, 1835. The West Roxbury Branch Railroad was opened for travel early in 1849.

and sanctuary together went out from the old paths. From 1837 to 1843 Theodore Parker was its pastor, though his rationalism then was not so radical as after his removal to Boston. The Encyclopadia Britannica (XVIII, p. 301, col. 1), says - and its statements will not be suspected of any bias toward orthodoxy—"He denied all special authority to the Bible, to Christ. and to Christianity. The Boston Unitarian clergy denounced the preacher" (for a sermon preached in 1841 on "the transient and permanent in Christianity") "and declared that the young man must be silenced. No Unitarian publisher could be found for his sermon, and nearly all the pulpits of the city were closed against him. To exchange with him was fatal to a minister's reputation for (even) Unitarian Orthodoxy." While such was the character of the pulpit utterances of the church in this community, you may judge what was the religious sentiment of the people, crowds came in carriages from all the region round to hear the champion of rationalism, and any suspicion of a leaning to spiritual religion subjected a man to all sorts of annoyance, even the children of such, in the streets on their way to and from school, received such treatment that often they reached home in tears. To intensify this state of things, the famous "Brook Farm" was then in the heyday of its popularity, in another part of the parish, and joined with Mr. Parker in pouring contempt on the gospel."

It was well for this church that at that time it had a pastor,

This was a nondescript experiment intended to eliminate the good of communism, and leave behind its evil. The leading spirit was the Rev. George Ripley, at one time a Unitarian minister in Purchase Street, Boston, and afterwards one of the editors of the American Encyclopædia, G. W. Curtis, Nathaniel Hawthorne, and other notabilities, both men and women, were among its members. Miss Elizabeth P. Peabody wrote a very appreciative account of it in The Dial, but she described her own hopes and aspirations rather than the thing as it was. Some articles in The Old and New and one in The Atlantic Monthly do not give a very high idea of the moral earnestness of the body, which soon fell to pieces by its own weight. Its radical mistake was the idea that society needed organic reconstruction. instead of a new life from God, that outward readjustments of form could remove all its evils. Whereas the one thing essential to its healing is that it should be permeated with the life of Christ. "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the kingdom of God," is as true of our social relations. as of our individual life.

who did not challenge debate, proudly confident that the force of his logic, and the power of his eloquence, would ensure him the victory, but one who was content quietly to preach the truth through which God sanctifies his people. And as he is the only one of the five pastors of this church who has passed from among us, it will be proper to speak of him more at length.

Rev. Christopher Marsh, son of Edward and Eunice Marsh, was born in Campton, N. H., August 4, 1794. The house stood on a retired and very hilly road to the east of the Congregational church. Converted at the age of twenty one, he at once began preparation for the work of the ministry, as did some others not long after from the same town. He graduated at Dartmouth College, 1820, studied theology for three years under private instruction, and was ordained June 4, 1823, pastor in Sanford, Me. After laboring six or seven years there, he was installed at Biddeford in the same State, where his daughter thinks he had the care of two pulpits, one in the upper and the other in the lower part of the town. Leaving there he became Secretary of the American Sunday-School Union for Massachusetts, and took up his residence in Cambridge, and here in 1833 he buried his wife, Nancy W. Pearson, daughter of Joseph and Hannah Pearson, who was born in Haverhill, N. H., October 14, 1796.1

¹ They were married July 9, 1823, and she was the mother of all his children, as follows: Elizabeth P., married Edward L. Goddard of Claremont, N. H., June 13, 1855, who died March 30, 1880, aged seventy. She now resides in Plainfield, N. J., with her son. Phæbe F., married Prof. Edwin Pierce, December 23, 1873, and resides in West Newton. Maria M. A., married John Haven of Boston, who died in West Newton, February 18, 1882. Christopher, married Caroline Disney of Cincinnati, O., where he now resides. In 1834, Mr. Marsh married Miss Lucy Gilpatrick, born in Biddeford, Me., July 3, 1792, whose labors for this church can never be forgotten by those who witnessed them, nor can its history be complete without some account of one who did so much for its prosperity. Converted at twenty years of age, she at once commenced a life of such active service to Christ, that the opposition called forth from her family constrained her to leave her home, though she went back and cared tenderly for her parents during their last illness. Removing to Boston, besides regular attendance on her church meetings, she was teacher in a school for colored children, and for several years was matron of the woman's refuge. Mr. Marsh called her from that position to be his helpmeet in West Roxbury, and it is not hazarding much to say, that he could hardly have found one better adapted

He began preaching here in a hall, in the second story of the building across the street, in January, 1834, though he was not installed till May 17, 1837.

He was now in the prime of life, of robust health, and of faith not less firm and vigorous, and here he labored till his dismission, December 11, 1850. Three years later, attracted by the prospect of helping another church in its early struggles, he removed to Jamaica Plain.

In the spring of 1858, his former people at Sanford sent for him, and he removed there, and entered into the work with his wonted earnestness, forgetting that he was now such an one as Paul the aged. He found babes whom he had baptized now office bearers in the church, a revival followed that more than doubled the membership, but the work was more than he could bear, and June 30, 1859, he fell on sleep.

He was a man of great practical wisdom, with a warm heart, and eminently a man of prayer. Never did a Sabbath find him in bed after five o'clock. This was his habit even when not in the ministry. He rose quietly, disturbing no one, and while others slept he wrestled at the mercy seat. His family never heard him complain of anybody or anything, and hundreds traced their conversion to his instrumentality.

It is interesting to note the way in which the Master led to the formation of this church. A little girl, who lived near what is now the Spring Street Station, Mary Whiting by name, used

to the work, or more zealous in it. She did all her own work at home, and many a time after labors in the house, which most women would have employed others to do for them, she has gone out for parish work, as though she had nothing else to do, nor was either distance, or wintry storm, allowed to hinder it. The parish in her day was not small, territorially at least, and she has often walked on foot through snow on errands of mercy, or ministering help and comfort when it was needed.

It was just like her, after her husband died, to devote herself to city mission work in Roxbury. Her friends entreated her to spare herself, but her earnest expectation and hope was that Christ would be glorified in her, whether by life or by death, and so it was. June 10, she sent in her resignation to the City Missionary Society, and before it was acted on, the Master took her to himself, June 20, 1868. Of her, also, that word of the Master was true, "She hath done what she could," for from the first to the last of her Christian course, she did with her might whatsoever her hands found to do.

to visit a friend in the family of Rev. Dr. Burgess in Dedham. She went with her to church, and that led her to seek to take her father's family there also. Instead of going with her, her father threatened to punish her if she went herself, and she was greatly troubled. After he died, God sent one to take care of the farm who took all the family to the church of Dr. Burgess, and four of them were received into it at the same communion. Years passed, and Mary's mother opened her house for preaching, August 26, 1832. Students from the seminary at Newton conducted the services, till a death in the family interrupted them, and they were not resumed, probably because the house was not large enough for the increasing numbers. In March, 1833, the hall already referred to was rented for \$12 per annum, and fitted up at a cost of \$25 more, of course in a very primitive way. A plain standing desk was the pulpit, that long stood in the basement of this building, and the pews were benches without backs. Twenty-eight persons subscribed \$126.50 for the year, and Dr. Burgess preached for the first time, April 14. to about fifty hearers. Ten of the subscribers were members of his church, and he wisely charged \$68.04 for his services during the year, that they might feel the work was their own and not his. So a hall that had been noted for dancing, became a place of prayer. Dr. Lyman Beecher, and John Codman were among the preachers that year. Next year fifty persons subscribed \$212.75, an increase of twenty-two names and \$98.

An ecclesiastical society was formed April 11, 1834, and the church was organized with twenty-five members, June 11, 1835. Eighteen of these brought letters from other churches, and seven entered for the first time into covenant with God. No minister that attended the council is living today. Dr. G. W. Blagden, then of Salem Street, Boston, preached the sermon, and Dr. Burgess gave the right hand of fellowship.

And here it is fitting to mention the kindness of Dr. Burgess to this church. In 1834 he gave \$300, intending to diminish the gift annually by \$50, till the church could go alone, but in 1840 he began again at \$150, diminishing as before, and at various times added more, till the whole amounted to over \$1,500. It is not given to every new church to have so good a neighbor. He desired that nothing should be asked from the Home Missionary Society, or from any one, except for the erec-

tion of this house of worship, but after 1841, in the protracted struggles of the church, \$650 were received from the Massachusetts Home Missionary Society.

This building does not equal, either in cost or in beauty, many belonging to neighboring churches, but it was no small undertaking to erect it at that time. Mr. Edward Richards, who gave \$40 per annum for church expenses, besides the pastor's house rent, gave the land. Friends in Boston gave \$4,000, neighboring churches \$800 more, and \$845 was raised here at home. The ladies gave the pulpit. The first communion service was the gift of Judge Hubbard, of Boston, a man who had a share in every good work. But no one did more toward the erection of this house of worship than Mr. Marsh. Though his salary was only some \$550, \$200 of the \$845 subscribed here came from his purse, and afterwards when \$977 of a debt was raised here, \$300 of that also was from him, and most of the labor of getting subscriptions devolved on him. He often traveled on foot on this errand till he came back at night quite exhausted.1

The only thing memorable in the erection of the chapel in 1859, was the heartiness with which the church took hold of the work, though it is to be regretted that the size of the lot did not allow it to be larger.

It was the love of this church for one of its pastors, who had been compelled to go to Dedham to find a home, that led to the building of the parsonage in 1867, though he for whom it was intended has only been once, perhaps twice, within the door.

¹ The following letter is in the archives of the parish. It is without date, but was written probably in 1838. It was read by Mr. Beckwith at the meeting in the evening, June 7, 1885:

To the Spring Street Parish, now in Session:

GENTLEMEN, — As you may find some difficulty in meeting all your parish expenses for the last year, you will please accept of the one hundred dollars due me from the parish up to April 1, 1838. I cast myself upon the Lord for the future. Wishing you grace, mercy, and peace, I subscribe myself,

Your servant and pastor,

CHRISTOPHER MARSH.

P. S. The expenses of my family, and what I have given to the parish and to other objects the last year, not including the above, are \$710.81.

C. M.

Besides the 25 original members, Mr. Marsh received 81 into the church, 106 in all, and it gives us some idea of the discouragements of his day, and the smallness of the population then, that out of the 106 his successor found only 57.

Of that successor it need only be said that he was installed May 7, 1851. Severe sickness laid him aside at the close of 1866, and as his physicians decided that he could not preach for a year to come, he resigned January 16, 1867, and was dismissed January 30, 1868, by the same council that installed his successor. During these years 75 were received by letter, and 50 by profession, 125 in all; still only 86 members remained at the close of 1866, and at the end of 1867, his successor found only 78. There are only 11 persons in the church today who were in it when the second pastor came, and of them only one (Miss Mary Ann Gould) belongs to the original members.

It may show the connection of church prosperity with secular things, to add that the membership rose from 57 in 1851, to 97 in 1856, and at one time in 1860 it was 101, though reduced to 90 at the end of the year, and yet January 1, 1867, it was only 86, increasing 40 in five years, and then diminishing 11 in 11 years. This check to church growth was caused by the check given to the population of West Roxbury, by the rebuilding of the railroad bridge below Roslindale, which compelled us for months to go to Boston via Dedham and Readville, followed by a rise in the price of season tickets to Boston —facts which show that spiritual prosperity is not measured by the number on the

¹ Thomas Laurie was born at Craigleith, a suburb of Edinburgh, Scotland, May 19, 1821. Sailed from Greenock, June 5, arriving at New York, August 2, 1830; graduated at Illinois College, 1838, and Andover Theological Seminary, 1841. Ordained as missionary in Jacksonville, Ill., March 6, 1842. Married to Martha F. Osgood, July 21, 1842. Sailed for Smyrna, July 29, arriving September 7, and at Mosul, November 11, 1842. Mrs. Laurie died December 16, 1843. Left Mosul for Beirut, October 21, and reached Beirut, December 11, 1844. Left Beirut for Smyrna, May 9, 1846. July 11, sailed for Boston, arriving September 20. Installed at South Hadley, June 7, 1848; resigned January 12, 1851. Installed over Pilgrim Church, Providence, R. I., November 24, 1869; resigned February 15, 1885, to take effect July 12. Married to Ellen A. Ellis, May 25, 1848. Children: Martha Ellen, born at South Hadley, August 12, 1850; married James O. Vatman, August 23, 1871; Annie, at West Roxbury, August 23, 1857; married Lawton S. Brooks, M. D., May 22, 1878.

church roll, but by faithfulness to Christ in the circumstances in which he appoints our service.

Though this church is small, it never held back from the formation of new churches in the vicinity. February 15, 1853, it dismissed three members to the council that formed what is now the Central Church, Jamaica Plain, and five more to its first communion, and May 18, 1864, though not satisfied that the time had come for the formation of a church at Roslindale, it dismissed six to the council that met there, leaving the question of organization to its Christian discretion. It was organized, but in two years disappeared from the minutes of the General Association of Massachusetts.

It further shows the difficulties to be contended with in this place, that though the third pastor, Rev. William S. Hubbell—ordained January 30, 1868, dismissed January 25, 1872—during those four years received 26 into the church, yet when he left its membership was only 77, or less by one than when he came.

The fourth pastor, Rev. Edward Strong, D. D., when he was installed on May 2, 1872, found only 74 members—three less than in January 1—and after receiving in ten years 100 more, left 137, July 13, 1882, lacking only eleven of being double what he found it.²

¹ Rev. William S. Hubbell, son of Rev. Stephen and Martha (Stone) Hubbell was born at Wolcottville, Conn., April 19, 1837. Graduated at Yale College, 1858, and at Andover Theological Seminary, 1866, after an interval of three years spent in the army. Assistant to Rev. R. S. Storrs, D. D., of Braintree, Mass., from September, 1866, to January, 1868. Installed over the Franklin Street Church, Somerville, Mass., January 31, 1872, and dismissed November 22, 1881. Installed over the North Presbyterian Church, Buffalo, N. Y., December 22, 1881. Married October 9, 1866, to Caroline Southmayd, of Middletown, Conn., daughter of Alfred and Susan C. (Baker) Southmayd. Children: Mary Charlotte, July 24, 1867; Susan, February 19, 1869; William Stone, November 8, 1874; and De Witt, June 2, 1876.

² Rev. Edward Strong, D. D., born Somers, Conn., October 25, 1813. Graduated at Yale College 1838. Studied one year at Union, and two years at New Haven Theological Seminaries. Ordained pastor of what is now College Street Church, New Haven, December 14, 1842; dismissed July 1, 1862. Installed pastor of South Church, Pittsfield, Mass., December 1, 1864; dismissed December 1, 1871. Married to Miss Margaret S. Sherman, of New Haven, who died March 20, 1873, and to Mrs. Harriet

And yet so constant are the removals that of the 137 left by Dr. Strong, your present pastor, installed November 21, 1882, found only 134, and these were reduced to 131 before the end of the year.

Surely, then, we should do with our might whatsoever our hands find to do for the salvation of men, and let us look carefully on all sides ere we conclude that our labors are in vain in the Lord.

The review of these fifty years ought to inspire us with new courage in our service for Christ, since we see a constant advance from the first day of small things and great opposition, to the bright prospects now before us.

The Lord blessed this church at the outset, that in the long struggle before it, it might never be discouraged. Twenty years later, in 1855, he gave an increase of 21, that we might know he had not forsaken us. Twenty years after that he added 18 more, 14 of them new converts, and the year following he added 18 also, that we might know he did not weary of doing us good, but the largest blessing we ever received was only two years ago, when 20 were received by profession and 10 by letter, though losses reduced the net increase to 22.

It seems as though in such dealings with us, the Lord Jesus allured us to prove the extent of his power to bless, and to expect yet greater things in years to come. If all through the past he has dealt out larger and still larger blessing, what may we not look for in the future from one able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think? His power was not once mighty but now exhausted, but the power that now worketh in us is able to do even greater things than these. His promise is "One shall become a thousand, and a small one a strong nation," and, lest we hesitate he adds, "I, the Lord will hasten

S. Wright of Springfield, Mass., September 10, 1874. Children by the first wife, Harriet Deming, Edward Sherman, William Thaddeus.

¹ Rev. Clarence Augustine Beckwith was born in Charlemont, Mass., July 21, 1849. Graduated at Olivet College, Mich., 1874. Studied at New Haven Theological Seminary, 1875 and 1876, and at Bangor Theological Seminary, 1877. Ordained pastor of First Church, Brewer, Me., January 9, 1878; dismissed September 1, 1882. Married to Miss V. Eugenie Loba, September 25, 1878. Paul Loba born August 27, 1884.

it in its time." If the church is his body, in which he lives, and through which he works and reveals his power, remember that it is power to save to the uttermost, and pray that you may know what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe according to the working of the strength of his might, which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead, and made him to sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named not only in this world, but also in that which is to come.

Is not such power sufficient for all our wants? Enough to meet every emergency whether in our own lives, or in that of the church which he has purchased with his own blood?





